1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S PLAY AND GAMES

*857 524 The ditty goes on like this: 'Boos, Boos, daughter of Hussain the afflicted, has filled my thoughts at midday (when the sun is hottest). May God fill her thoughts.' The idea is to squeeze a finger of the hand held behind her back while pointing to a particular hole. Thus the two playing girls choose a hole without the other side knowing which one it is. Then the girl whose finger was squeezed hides herself behind the back of her partner, merely by leaning over sideways. The opposite team has three guesses as to the hole chosen. If they guess correctly the turn passes to them. If they do not guess correctly the girl who was hiding reappears to confirm that by showing them the correct hole. The idea of her being separated from her partner is to prevent collusion. In this case, one girl from the successful side spits into one of the 'home' rows of her opponents. The hole is then closed by throwing in some earth. The aim of the game is to close all the holes of the opponents' rows. The first side to do this has won.

*857 A very popular play situation with girls is the representation of some of the adult female occupations and ceremonies. This would involve making straw figures, bedecked in bits of cloth as men or women and children, and with the help of stones, building a house.[1] All the details of an event or ritual are played out in a make-believe way. Thus marriage, circumcision, cooking, and social meetings are all imitated.

524 526 The adult world is almost entirely deprived of organized games. Men play the 'Seega' (No. 19*) only, and on ceremonial occasions 'Hatab', which is a form of fencing played by two persons, each holding a thick stave (nabbout) of about six or seven feet long, each player trying to strike the other on his body. Women have no organized games of any sort, not even those played by the girls.

*857 ● 517 In a sociological analysis of play situations and games it is appropriate to refer to the attitude of adults towards play. The notion of a 'dignified man' as a social ideal, contrasts with that of a man who plays. This reflects the marked dichotomy between the adult world which is considered to be serious, busy and involved in social happenings, and the children's world which, being considered transitory, uneconomic, and even frivolous, is in most cases despised by the sober adults. To describe a grown-up's action as 'childish play' is to condemn it, and such a phrase is highly offensive and might lead to bitter altercation, even blows.

Thus one can hardly find any adult who shows any interest, much less enthusiasm, in children's play and games. Indeed, it would be unbecoming in an adult. If a group of men happens to gather near some children playing, the children immediately realize the situation and have to withdraw somewhere else; otherwise they will expose themselves to a scolding or a missile directed at them. Whatever adults do, is work, for it is only children who play. Yet this does not mean that they have no leisure; they 517 spend it in exchanging news, gossip, tea and coffee drinking and visiting

[1] By the time they reach adolescence girls are expected to have made a sufficient number of dolls to be used as a decoration for their marital homes.

* [The author apparently means No. 18, See category 116, pp. 150-151--Analyst]

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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each other. But they think it below their dignity to play games or 'bounce about'. When the writer told a gathering of villagers about some of the games played by adults in the cities they denounced it as childish and undignified. One of them added in excuse, 'By the end of a day's work we are worn out; we just want to relax and not play'.

Looking at this question from the adult viewpoint, it is not incorrect to state that growing up in the village is a continuous process of weaning the child from play to the serious activities of 'a dignified man'. In infancy a child might respond truthfully to the father's question as to whether it had been playing, but as the child grows older, the fear of giving a direct answer increases, and an evasive reply replaces the earlier readiness to tell the truth. An adolescent would definitely deny playing, for fear of reproval or even punishment. Thus an adolescent who has imbibed 'adab' is one who has outgrown all play in 'open spaces', and has thus severed all links with the most characteristic feature of child-life. On the whole, by the age of sixteen for boys and thirteen for girls, they normally terminate their play life as one of the signs of their maturity.

There is also the religious factor that contributes to the regarding of play as an undesirable activity. This religious motive is mainly due to the effect of the mystic tradition abominating play as an indulgence in pleasure which should be avoided. According to the mystic views, 'a pious man' should devote himself to worship and work; but play is 'lahw'—licentiousness. In the minds of the people the underlying concept of 'lahw' extends itself to other types of entertainment, e.g. the cinema, the theatre, playing or listening to music.[1] While it is true that the younger generation, in some part, go to the cinema whilst visiting the towns, the majority of the older generation regard cinema and theatre-going as 'haram'—something sinful. This 'Puritan' attitude towards play and entertainments, however, has no Koranic support; it is only based on the example of the rugged and restrained life of the 'pious ancestors'.

Looking at the organization of games, the second striking feature, after the marked dichotomy between the adult's and the child's world, is the almost complete segregation of both sexes, in games, after the age of six or seven at the latest. The sex distinction is so binding that it is unbecoming of a member of one sex to play the games of the other sex. Nevertheless, the writer has seen a group of girls in one of the back streets play the ball-game 'Awal-hawal'. Yet immediately they noticed a man approaching (not the writer), they all dispersed, only to resume play later. In contrast with the boys, ball-games with the girls are usually restricted to wall bouncing or catching games. There is no single game which is played by both sexes.

[1] This tradition is very similar to that of the Puritans in England as shown in the following quotation from the early eighteenth century: 'Play must be forbidden in all its forms. The children shall be instructed in this matter in such a way as to show them, through the presentation of religious principles, the wastefulness and folly of all play. They shall be led to see that play will distract their hearts and minds from God . . . and work nothing but harm to their spiritual lives.'

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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Chapter Eight

CHILDREN'S TALES, THEIR TEXTS, ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE

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It is important for an understanding of the social and psychological development of children in Silwa, to examine the tales, fables, and other stories transmitted to them from time immemorial.[1] Before embarking on this, however, a few introductory remarks should be made in connection with folk literature in general in this community. Such literature is relatively meagre in both quantity and quality compared with some other non-literate communities. In Silwa at present there are no myths, indigenous legends, and hardly any economic lore as in some primitive communities, all of which attempt to explain the nature of the universe, the history and origin of the people, or transmit traditional knowledge as applied to the solution of economic problems.[2] There is no doubt that, before the advent of Islam, and of Christianity before that, the Ancient Egyptian myths and folk literature must have been the oral code guiding the beliefs and values of folk people in Ancient Egypt. The survival of these is still evident, in spite of Islamic doctrines, in beliefs and ideas about jinn, invisible counterpart (Karina), saints, sacrifice, the evil eye, and so forth.[3] The changes in religious and social attitudes of the people, through becoming part of the Moslem society, have obscured the previously existing system of oral tradition. Perhaps some of its elements still persist in a modified form in the folk tales and children's stories found at present in rural Egypt.

The adult attitude towards children's stories is very similar to their attitude towards children's games, and there is hardly any adult, especially amongst men, who admit that he tells stories to his children. Stories, as seen through the 'puritanic' eyes of adults, are considered to be demonic, and of no practical value. Story-telling is also included in the concept of dissipated leisure (lahw) which such a stoically religious community does

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[1] G.P. Lestrade, 'Traditional Literature', in *The Bantu Speaking Tribes*, ed. by I. Schapera, London, 1946.

[2] The full text of the stories is given at the end of this chapter.

[3] See E. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, London, 1926.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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not accept as one of the commendable spheres of indulgence in a pious life.[1] While mothers may occasionally tell their children a story at night, fathers could never be expected to do it, as it might encourage that intimacy and levity towards them which is incompatible with the ideal of paternal respect. Story-hearing and telling is a feature of the child and adolescent groups. The writer has not found literate people in Silwa entertaining the reading of novels in the modern sense, as they are regarded 'unreal' and of no immediate value.[2] Children and adolescents must be weaned away as quickly as possible from such imaginative frivolities like story-telling, and acquire the didactic literature of proverbs and wise sayings that enable the boy to cope with the realistic and matter-of-fact affairs of life. The accumulated wisdom of the past, the adults think, is contained in these proverbs and the reported deeds and acts of men of religious or social prestige. They are inordinately fond of quoting proverbs and maxims whenever an occasion for them arises. Rattray has observed the African's predilection for proverbs in his speech: much the same might be said for Silwa. He states that the best retort 'for any new-fangled suggestion or argument, however convincing, is to quote some proverb, however banal and inept, for such a reply is invested with all the force and sanctity of immemorial usage, and therefore conclusive'.[3]

Story-telling also includes the interesting events that happened in the village, or that happened to children. It is a more preferable pastime in winter than in summer, when boys, and occasionally girls, gather at a cosy corner outside the house 'to curtail the long winter nights' as one of the boys put it. On the whole, one can say that a child, on the average, spends an hour a week in these story-telling sessions. But this does not mean that all children take part in these sessions, or know fairy tales and stories. In fact, quite a few children, of both sexes, whom I asked in the compulsory school and in the neighbourhood, knew no stories of any kind. If parents tolerate these story-telling sessions, they do not consider them of any educative value at all.

Children, however, listen to stories and tell them to each other, not in the house or in the presence of the father, but usually outside the house. They will stop their narration on the approach of an adult, and consequently the writer was not able to listen to or observe any of their normal sessions. These sessions are seldom held during the day, as the boys believe that story-telling in daylight brings wrath, like sleeping in the late afternoon (nawmat al asr). Here one sees the functional relationship between children's leisure and their economic responsibilities. Through such beliefs, with their concomitant emotional effects, the scope for flouting responsibility for work is delimited in a roundabout way. Like play, the community

[1] See Chapter VII for the connection of 'lahw' and play.
[2] There are no novels at all amongst the books that the villagers possess.
[3] R. S. Rattray, 'The African Child in Proverb, Folklore and Fact', in *Africa*, Vol. VI, 1935, p. 426. For some of the proverbs collected in the village, see Appendix VI.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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to be specialists in transmitting to others the religious knowledge of the Holy Book and the pious ancestors. The oral means of communicating and committing to memory the accumulated experiences is the best guide for perpetuating the group's tradition. It is not surprising, then, that old people are considered as knowing more than the young, and that, on these grounds, they are worthy of respect and obedience. The young have to wait many years before they can wield the same prestige and authority, for the instruments of wisdom may only be acquired through the passage of time. It is not unusual to hear people who wish to assert their position or to impress others with their views saying: 'I am a man who has witnessed both the pre-Islamic (jahiliya) and Islamic eras.'[1]

Good memory is certainly a great asset and indeed highly valued in Silwa, and the person with a good memory is usually described as the one with 'the full head'. The ability to remember names, places, events, and genealogies enhances the person's popularity and makes his participation and consultation desirable in social activities. The emphasis on memory training is impressed on the child as early as its efforts to learn to talk. Mothers utter a few words for the child to repeat, and then ask it to go round to all those who may be present, and say these words to each in turn, and this is recognized as the best method for the teaching of language. One of the favourite amusements of adults with children is to test the latter in reciting the names of their families in genealogical order. Very frequently, however, the adults may purposely interject incorrect names to mislead the children. Some children between the age of three and four, on being asked by the writer to recite their family names, would tell him as many as four or five of their names (the first name, followed by the father's name, the grandfather's, the great-grandfather's and so on).[2] In a symbolical way, the mother encourages the child to eat pigeon's head, as it is believed that this will foster the child's alertness of memory in later years of life.

It would be very difficult to determine here to what extent the importance laid on memory and memorization has been the product of the Islamic view of learning. It should be mentioned, however, in this connection that knowledge, for the Moslem scholars, was not so much a reaching out to the unknown (research), as it was a mechanical process of amassing the 'known'; the known being eternal and given, is unchangeable. Thus the acquisition of information and the deduction from accepted premises were the most important methods of knowledge.[3] A learned man

[1] This is, of course, an artificial claim such as the English expression, 'I don't know him from Adam'. The historical sense amongst the villagers, especially the older generation, is mainly thought of in the partition between the two eras, the pre-Islamic and the Islamic.

[2] It must be pointed out that in Silwa, or for that matter in Egypt as a whole, there is no system of first names and surnames. In Silwa, every person is always called by his first name. Unfamiliarity or respect requires only the addition of the title 'sheikh' in front of the first name.

[3] H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, pp. 64–6.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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times the pigeon-houses are painted with simple white designs. This is done, so I was told in one or two villages, because the birds like it, and it draws them back to their own houses! Pigeons are kept chiefly for the sake of the dung, which is considered to be a valuable fertilizer for the fields. Probably, however, more harm than good is done to the crops by the breeding of these birds, for they accumulate in large flocks when the corn is ripening, and are with difficulty dispersed by men and boys armed with slings and stones.

FIG. 6. A VILLAGE HOUSE OF THE BETTER SORT

The houses of the peasants, in many cases mere hovels, are made of crude bricks, sometimes covered over with mud plastering. In the better houses (see Fig. 6) there is generally a flight of steps leading to an upper story, where there may be a sitting-room (*mandareh*), furnished with benches (called *dikak*, singular *dikkeh*), which are covered with rugs and supplied with cushions. The room in which the foodstuffs are kept is also usually in this upper story. The flat roof (Fig. 7) is a pleasant place on which to sit and watch the life in the streets below; it also serves as a hen-run, dog- and cat-run, a drying-ground, and is put to other utilitarian purposes. Here, for example, are stored huge bundles of sticks and dry maize-stalks (called *būṣ*), together with quantities of cakes of cow- and buffalo-dung, neatly stacked in rows, which are used

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

87.

Long Since Decided.

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Ṭiliḥtᵉ fō' es-suṭaḥ
baški-l-hawa lalla.
Le'ēt telāte beyi'ru fi-kalām Alla.
'alû-li: taḥdi-bnê 'ammik?
'ultᵉ: la, walla!
'alû-li: taḥdi-bnê ḫalik?
'ultᵉ: šarᶜ Alla!
'alû-li: taḥdi-l-ɣarīb?
ḥafattᵉ: bismalla!

I mounted to the roof
And unburdened my love to Allah.
There I found three, who were reading in God's Word.
They said to me: Wilt thou take thy cousin on thy father's side?
I said: No, by Allah!
They said to me: Wilt thou take thy cousin on thy mother's side?
I said: No, by Allah's law!
They said to me: Wilt thou take the stranger?
Then I said to myself: In Allah's name!

[517] 1. During the cooler hours of the afternoon and evening, the roofs are much frequented.
3. Three old men.
4. Marriage between relatives is regarded as most natural. Compare No. 96, note on l. 1.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

134.

A Motto.

×539 114 517

When Maḥmûds stock of songs was exhausted, he came once again and dictated to me this song, in praise of the comfortable, dreamy mood, the "kēf", which the Egyptian loves so dearly. He insisted that I should place it as a sort of motto at the beginning of my book; he probably meant before the love-sonnets. (Maḥmûd called a love-song: ṛunet hawa).

Maḥlak, ya kēf,
'and arbāb el-ṛarām, maḥlak!
Mašnak, ya kēf,
'and illi ma yidriku ma'nak.

How sweet art thou, O contemplative quiet (kēf),
In the opinion of lovers, how sweet!
How hateful art thou, O contemplative quiet (kēf),
In the opinion of those, who understand not thy meaning!

4. . . . and therefore do not know what to do with thee.

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
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a shallow tub, and by pouring warm water over the body and scrubbing it with soap and date bast. In the public baths certain hours or days are set apart for the fair sex, and here many women spend half days bathing, adorning themselves, smoking, and gossiping. At these times no male, not even a eunuch would dare to set foot in the apartments.

In other respects also the women are by no means robbed of social pleasures. They visit each other often enough, if possible early in the morning, and are wont to remain half a day, a whole day, or even several days, though both parties may be in the same town. They smoke, drink coffee (the latter being less in use among the women than among the men—the opposite to what holds good among the Franks), gossip, show their ornaments and finery, tell stories and wonderful tales, sew, embroider (but do not knit), sing and dance, or better, make some one sing and dance before them (since a well-conducted lady ought neither to be seen nor heard, and therefore should not sing), laugh and make merry —in short the harem so greatly pitied elsewhere enjoy life, but on the sole condition, that no man be present! They are less often allowed to take a walk in the open air; some—and this is considered a great virtue—never leave the house after their marriage. Their lady friends come to visit them instead, and as almost every house in these regions has its court-yard or a terrace, women are by no means kept out of the open air. Moslim women are generally excused from the burdensome prayers of the men, and pious or even hypocritical women are in the Moslim female world a great rarity; indeed they scarcely know the most important doctrines of their religion. Piety in them is even looked upon with dislike.

At mid-day the husband always eats alone, or with his boys or guests. Immediately afterwards, however, the wife again comes into honour since her lord likes to enjoy his siesta in the chambers of the harem. After sunset no respectable woman must show herself outside the house, even though veiled and attended, and now, or some hours later, the husband